



## RESEARCH PAPER

# Deciphering Modi's Hindutva and Emerging Transnational Security Threats: The BJP's Hindu Nationalism in The Light of Regional and Global Security Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the emerging trends of transnational security threats based on the ideological orientations of Hindutva. The major variables of the study revolve around the politico-religious beliefs of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) respectively. In addition, the researchers have also investigated the factors which collaborate to spread the toxic right wing Hindu religious fundamentalism abroad. There are multiple aspects intertwined with the transnational security threats which are deep rooted in, contemporary, Modi's India. In recent decades, however, the status of India as a secular state is under threat due to rising preponderance of the Hindutva ideology through the entrenched rule of the Bharatya-Janata Party (BJP) and its Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. BJP as the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an organization dedicated to socially bifurcating India between a superior (according to themselves) Hindu class and inferior minorities, the party espouses Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva.

**KEYWORDS** Hindutva, India, Minority Rights, Modi, Transnational Security

## Introduction

At the age of eight Narendra Modi joined Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as Bal Swayamsevak (Child Volunteer) along with his duty at his father's tea stall. He had never been in any psychological orientation that may support to the secular conception of India as envisioned by its founding fathers. His class mates, teachers and even the political colleagues always remind him as the promoter of Hindu-Nationalism and the one who refuted the rights to life, liberty and property to any other religious minority especially the Muslims (Shashi Tharoor, 2018). In 1970's the saffron wave resurfaced in an independent and democratic India which led to the creation of Bharatya Janata Party (BJP). Later, after the two decades, BJP gained a political status to make governments in States (Provinces) and alliance in central government. In the same period other Hindu Extremist organizations like; Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal, Durga Vahini and other extremist right-wing Hindu nationalists gained street support and financial resources to strengthen the futuristic agenda of RSS through the platform of BJ (Jyotirmaya Sharma, 2015). The arrival of 2014, was the turning point in Indian political scenery when the RSS led BJP government was formed and Mr. Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of India. Without any doubt, India was made on the principles of secularism, democracy and

rule of law, however the Modi government transformed Ghandi's India into a Hindu majority state. This is something that creates concerns and perception about transnational security threats.

### **Literature Review**

The authors have made critical investigation, after reviewing all the available data sources, and divided the research into two major segments that include, RRS impacts, BJP's aggressive posture and Modi's policies before and after becoming the Prime Minister of India. Additionally, the impacts of Modi's policies to enhance internal and external security threats have been critically examined. For the purpose of this study extensive literature has been reviewed which includes books written on Hindutva-Philosophy, Research Articles published in national and international journals, the analysis of South-Asian experts, interviews and reports published by think tanks and major international newspapers respectively.

Hindus, as per Hindutva, should have open season to propagate their culture, but the same must be denied to the minorities of India as the latter are nothing but second-class citizens and should be socially treated as such (Graham, 1990). Dr Shashi Tharoor explains the entry and rise of , Narendra Modi, as in 1958 walked an eight year old boy from Vadnagar, Gujrat named Narendra Damodardas Modi, the son of a tea seller associated with the RSS. He was said to be a headstrong individual with a penchant for centralizing decision-making within his own person as well as 'doing things his own way' and over the decades the world would watch him rise to the pinnacle of political leadership in India (Masood, et. al., 2020); Tharoor, 2018). The ideology if Hindutva asserts that Hindus, should have open season to propagate their culture, but the same must be denied to the minorities of India as the latter are nothing but second-class citizens and should be socially treated as such (Graham, 1990). Muslims and Sikhs, particularly in Western countries, have been subjected to social media harassment and targeted killing by 'agents linked to the Indian government' especially if they oppose and raise their voice against the Indian government's policies. A particular and grisly example was the June, 2023 killing of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a Sikh Gurdwara in British Columbia, who was a Canadian citizen (Cecco, 2023). On September 10-12, 2021, an online international conference called "Dismantling Global Hindutva" took place involving American universities and scholars. As the name suggests, the conference was meant to discuss the global threat posed the rise of Hindutva ideology (Yaseen, et. al. 2022a). Whereas the US-based Hindu Right would seek to silence a single scholar or panel at such conferences in the past, this time they attempted to quash the whole event (Sundaram, 2023). Another tactic through which the Hindu Right seeks to entrench support for its Hindu extremist policies in India as well as in the West is through interference in the latter's elections. This trend has picked up especially in the Modi era, where any Western leader unconditionally supporting the Indian government's policies finds himself/herself being actively campaigned for by the Hindu Right in presidential/parliamentary elections. For instance, in general election campaigns in the UK, especially in 2019, there was active collusion between the Hindu Right groups and the Conservative Party, and the former mobilized support for the latter and also demonized minorities in the UK in the process (Sen, 2022).

### **Material and Methods**

Qualitative and quantitative mixed method research techniques have been applied to understand the Hindutva ideology and cross-sectional N-type methods are functionalized to investigate the historical facts about the role of Hindutva Ideology in BJP's politics. A qualitative analysis of contemporary literature available on right wing

orthodox Hindu-ideas of political marginalization of minorities has been adopted to comprehend the current dynamics of Hindutva in Indian politics of Modi Sarkar and its implications on regional and global security have been studied.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **What is Hindutva ideology?**

Secularism is generally taken to mean the separation of religion from affairs of state, and to not have a state religion. Various countries apply this in divergent ways. The French, for instance, bar expression of religious faith in public offices and educational institutions. They are of the view that allowing one faith to propagate publicly would open the floodgates to social strife. On the other hand, the Indian model of secularism, in practice since Partition in 1947, claims to embrace wholeheartedly the religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the country. Every religious faith is apparently permitted to express and promote its tenets and practices in the melting pot of civilizations that Indians tout their country as being. This is due to millennia of cultural and religious intermingling in the Subcontinent which permits religio-cultural harmony in the country today (Shashi Tharoor, 2018).

### **Recent Wave of Hindutva: The Saffronisation of Secular India**

In recent decades, however, this status of India as a secular state is under threat due to rising preponderance of the Hindutva ideology through the entrenched rule of the Bharatiya-Janata Party (BJP) and its Prime Minister, Narendra Modi (Yaseen, et. al., 2022). The political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an organization dedicated to socially bifurcating India between a superior (according to themselves) Hindu class and inferior minorities, the party espouses Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva. The ideology is about rejection of any cultural assimilation between the Hindu faith and others. It detests the Vivekananda notion of equality of faiths and harmony between them for the sake of peace and tranquillity. Hindus, as per Hindutva, should have open season to propagate their culture, but the same must be denied to the minorities of India as the latter are nothing but second-class citizens and should be socially treated as such (Saeed, et. al., 2023;Graham, 1990).

RSS founders, such as Golwalker and Savarkar, rejected the secularization and democratization of the Indian cultural milieu since 1947, believing that territorial nationalism, over the apparent right of Hindus to be supreme in India, is a betrayal against Hindus and a continuation of centuries of oppression against them. India's national culture should be based on Hinduism and minorities should have no say in how the country is run. The latter can either adjust themselves to this viewpoint, or leave India. Any view about cultural diversity is thus defenestrated in favour of puritanism. In this way, Hindutva has a historical dimension as well. The Sanghis believe that whoever came to rule India in lieu of Hindus was not native to India and thus defecated on purity of the pristine Hindu land that was the Indian subcontinent. They consider centuries of Muslim rule in the subcontinent to be oppressive foreign rule, and the Muslim Sultans to have their own interests contrary to that of the country that they subjugated. Learned scholars such as Dr. Shashi Tharoor are dismissive of this particular point, arguing that successive generations of Mughal rulers were born in India, embraced it, worked for its welfare, and endeavoured to guard its borders fiercely (Shashi Tharoor, 2018). Thus, the Muslim rulers were as Indian as any other person of any other faith. However, the obsession with drawing native cultural borders based on religion has blinded the Sangh Parivar to this

obvious historical reality. Being in power through the BJP, Hindutva extremists have no compunctions about the very act of rewriting history to suit their interests and viewpoints.

The early twentieth century current of racial prejudice and violence inevitably made its way to the Indian subcontinent, where figures such as Savarkar and Golwalker lapped up the Nazi ideology of racial superiority and analysed Indian history and society through that lens. The RSS was thus founded in 1925, and immediately incorporated Hindu nationalist beliefs into its very genes. With the RSS bitterly opposing Partition based on territorial lines and thus Pakistan's independence, an RSS activist named Nathuram Godse put bullets into the chest of revered Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi in January 1948 when the latter so much as hinted at giving Pakistan its due share in the bifurcated financial assets. The RSS faced the arrest of many of its prominent leaders, including Savarkar himself, and was banned as an organization the next month. However, in the next few years, the bitter opposition to India's political and cultural system on part of the RSS leadership continued unabated despite the ban. In 1958, the RSS walked an eight year old boy from Vadnagar, Gujrat named Narendra Damodardas Modi, the son of a tea seller associated with the RSS. He was said to be a headstrong individual with a penchant for centralizing decision-making within his own person as well as 'doing things his own way' (Tharoor, 2018), and over the decades the world would watch him rise to the pinnacle of political leadership in India, with deadly results for the country's minorities both internally and externally, as well as assertiveness and aggressiveness towards the neighbours of India, giving rise to security threats beyond borders.

### **Hindu Nationalism and Transnational Security Threats**

While the rise of Hindutva through the BJP has entailed intensified persecution against minorities, communal rioting, and a more muscular assertion of Hindu cultural nationalism within India, unlike the past this trend in recent years has started to go more global, with Hindu groups in various countries engaging in proactive lobbying, aggressive dissent-suppressing tactics against minorities like targeted assassination, social media harassment, death threats, influencing elections in various in order for more India-friendly policies, attempts to curb academic freedoms on foreign university campuses if the latter so much as mention Hindutva let alone discuss its tenets and drawbacks, inciting communal riots in foreign countries and thus make the situation dangerous not just for minorities but cause an overall security issues. The picture certainly is concerning, and has been tolerated because of several reasons. First, as mentioned previously, Modi and his party are adept at media management of their image not just in India but all over the world. The need for this arose after the vilification Modi personally endured as a result of the Gujrat Riots in 2002 where he failed to take decisive action to safeguard the Muslim community against Hindu rioters (Mishra, 2000). They hired lobbying firms, media operatives to improve their impression through promotion of news about their economic and investment incentives, and this attracted the attention of world leaders like Donald Trump over the years. Global leaders overlook the fact that minorities are under threat in their nations as a result of an ideology inspired by Nazism, and look greedily at India's apparent economic performance. The fact that their act of omission exacerbates the transnational security threats emanating from proactive Hindu cultural nationalism does not register with them.

The Hindutva ideology seems to have galvanized many Hindus in India in recent years. There has been an increased occurrence of communal tensions and oppression of minorities in India during the Modi years. The activism of Hindutva-supporting groups,

their influence in the government, and their lobbying efforts have grown more proactive in India, resulting in suppression of pro-minority sentiments, social media harassment, and death threats. Make no mistake, this happened in the past as well, but in current times especially it seems to have evolved beyond India's borders, posing security concerns for minorities as well as any academic person who is averse to the Modi government's policies. Harassment of minorities and targeted assassination seem to have been particular tools in the Indian shed.

### **Minorities under Siege in Modi's India**

Muslims and Sikhs, particularly in Western countries, have been subjected to social media harassment and targeted killing by 'agents linked to the Indian government' (Cecco, 2023) especially if they oppose and raise their voice against the Indian government's policies. A particular and grisly example was the June, 2023 killing of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a Sikh Gurdwara in British Columbia, who was a Canadian citizen. Nijjar was a supporter of the Khalistan movement, which seeks an independent Sikh homeland in the Indian state of Punjab. According to the leaders of the movement, the Indian government has oppressed Sikh minorities for decades since Partition, and so they feel the Sikhs must have their own separate state in order to remain free from Indian oppression. The claim about oppression does have some justification, as exemplified by Operation Blue Star in 1984, where the Indira Government stormed the Golden Temple in Amritsar to allegedly ferret out Sikh separatists, resulting in killing of many innocent Sikhs. Much of the leadership of the movement escaped to Western countries, and over the decades their activism for Khalistan has continued from foreign soil. Only recently, though, have 'agents linked to the Indian government' got so brazen as to assassinate them on foreign soil.

Not only in Canada, but also in the United States (one of India's largest trading partners) and other Western nations do minorities face security threats. For instance, soon after the Nijjar killing, FBI agents in California contacted Sikh activists like Gurpatwant Singh Panun to warn them of similar assassination plots by Indian intelligence agents (Hussain, 2023). Another Sikh activist Avatar Singh Khanda apparently died of Leukemia in Birmingham City in the United Kingdom (UK), but whose death has some resemblance to the 2006 death of Russian defector Alexander Litvinenko in London and the attempted assassination of former Russian agent Sergei Skripal in the city of Salisbury, UK. Khanda is alleged to have been poisoned with the connivance of Indian government agents. Such brazen moves by pro-Indian agents show quite vividly the lengths to which the BJP government may be willing to go in order to silence minority voices and pose a grave security threat to them transnationally.

Muslims, too, have frequently undergone harm to their well-being both offline and online on foreign soil, whether or not they point out the oppression being perpetrated against their religious brethren and other minorities in the Hindutva-laced Indian regime. Hindu extremists have become more proactive in Western countries in recent years, often to the detriment of safety of Muslims. One would hear about communal riots between Hindus and Muslims taking place in India in the past, but in the Hindu nationalist era, this grave occurrence has started to trend in Western countries as well. Often, Hindu extremists are found conducting India-style rallies proclaiming Hindutva slogans against minorities and harassing Muslims and other minorities. For instance, in 2022, a communal riot between Muslims and Hindus took place in Leicester, UK, causing harm to property of Muslims (Ellis-Petersen, 2022). This way, the virus of Hindutva extremism is starting to penetrate Western countries as well. All this shows that minorities may not be safe and secure from Indian government suppression even if they leave India for other countries.

## **Hindutva's Transnational Repression led by BJP Government**

The repression has now spread to South-Asian countries like Pakistan as well, where, according to a Guardian report in April, 2024, and a press briefing by the Spokesperson, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, the same month confirmed that Indian government agents have killed over twenty Pakistanis on Pakistani soil in the last few years! This is in line with the chauvinistic bent of Indian foreign policy in recent times, wherein the BJP is unwilling to tolerate dissent against the Indian government even on foreign soil. This is a concerning new orientation in the Indian foreign policy, which will pose security concerns for citizens of other countries as well in the future (Mofa, 2024).

In academia as well, supporters of the BJP government in particular, or Hindutva activists in general, have been engaged in transnational suppression in recent years. Be it Hindu professors in New Zealand rebuked by the Hindu Council there for voicing anti-Hindutva opinions, or academic harassment against anti-Hindutva campaigners in Australia, supporters of this extremist movement are keen to silence dissent academically beyond borders as well. However, the most brazen of their attempts to shut down dissenting voices is related to international conferences on Hindutva, which has been observed more than once. Hindutva-linked groups frequently make use of white supremacist arguments in foreign countries to justify their activities and paint all anti-Hindutva voices as racist and oppressive, which is ironic as they themselves are alleged to engage in such oppression, as the instances described above amply show (Tan, 2022).

On September 10-12, 2021, an online international conference called "Dismantling Global Hindutva" took place involving American universities and scholars. As the name suggests, the conference was meant to discuss the global threat posed by the rise of Hindutva ideology. Whereas the US-based Hindu Right would seek to silence a single scholar or panel at such conferences in the past, this time they attempted to quash the whole event (Sundaram, 2023). The conference was sponsored by many departments and units in North American institutions, such as Harvard and Princeton. Hindu Right groups in America gave a visceral response to the conduct of the conference, even encouraging Hindu students to contact the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in order for the latter to pressure academia to cancel the conference. Emails and death threats were also sent to individual scholars to desist from participating in the conference, including one who was threatened that she would literally be bombed out of existence if she attended the conference! Though the pressure campaigns ultimately failed as the conference was conducted successfully, the frantic way in which the Hindu Right responded to the conference illustrates quite clearly how the rise of the Hindutva ideology has galvanized not just the Hindu Right in India, but energized their ranks in foreign countries too. They seek to impose the same Hindu nationalist chauvinism and hegemonic sentiment in Western and other societies as prevails among the Hindu right-wing in India itself. This is another example of how the rise of Hindu nationalism under the Modi government not only poses harm to academic freedoms transnationally, but actually puts the very security of dissenting voices abroad in jeopardy (Sundaram, 2022).

Another tactic through which the Hindu Right seeks to entrench support for its Hindu extremist policies in India as well as in the West is through interference in the latter's elections. This trend has picked up especially in the Modi era, where any Western leader unconditionally supporting the Indian government's policies finds himself/herself being actively campaigned for by the Hindu Right in presidential/parliamentary elections. For instance, in general election campaigns in the UK, especially in 2019, there was active collusion between the Hindu Right groups and the Conservative Party, and the former mobilized support for the latter and also demonized minorities in the UK in the process

(Sen, 2022). Turning to the United States, for Donald Trump, that self-proclaimed 'friend of Hindus in the White House', the Hindu Right seems to lay out the red carpet of support every time there is an election. Businessmen linked to the Modi government donated to Trump's presidential campaigns in 2016 as well as in 2020, and PM Modi himself addressed a rally in Houston, Texas in 2020 saying "Ab ki Baar, Trump Sarkar". Like the Conservatives in the UK, the Hindu Right sees Trump as a man who wouldn't raise a hue and cry over minority rights in India, and thus someone they can do business with. While every lobbying group in America has the right to support whichever politician they wish, throwing support behind someone who wouldn't raise a finger over transnational suppression of minorities, academics, and other anti-Hindutva dissenters is blatant interference in foreign elections, and threatens to further embolden the Hindu Right groups wishing to suppress minority voices on foreign soil.

## Conclusion

Regionally as well, the BJP's assertive foreign policy born out of its Hindu nationalism has kept alive simmering tensions with its neighbours, especially Pakistan. The Hindu nationalists believe that partition on the basis of religion was a grave mistake and that India should thus never have good relations with Pakistan. This is so because a sizable minority (Muslims) sought their rights via a separate homeland, and today if other Indian minorities demand their just rights instead of being taken as second-class citizens by Hindu nationalists, it could be a threat to the main goal of the Hindutva movement: ensuring Hindu cultural supremacy and shutting down debate. It is due to this reason that acrimony has risen between Pakistan and India during the Modi regime, with chances of rapprochement appearing near-zero. On multiple occasions have the two countries gone close to war in the last ten years, pertinent examples being the aftermath of the February, 2019, Pulwama attack as well as Indian allegations of terrorism after the 2016 Uri attack. Threats of belligerence more frequently emanate from the Modi government than any other Indian regime in the past. For instance, in his election rallies for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, Modi effectively insinuated that India will now hunt down people on foreign soil who, according to it, threaten Indian interests. While this may have been more of an election boast than actual policy, it must not be ignored regarding the transnational security threat such Indian activities pose given the Hindu nationalist nature of the Modi government. Then there was the *Guardian* report in April, 2024, according to which the Indian intelligence had killed 20 Pakistanis on Pakistani soil in targeted assassinations. Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has not denied Indian agents carrying out these nefarious activities in other countries, which shows how brazen the Indian government tactics regarding suppression of dissent have become (Hannah Ellis-Petersen, Aakash Hassan and Shah Meer Baloch, 2024).

## Recommendations

This study recommends that international community should raise voice against the inclusion of Hindutva ideology because in the modern day the idea of secular India, by its founding fathers, is under great threat. This kind of exclusion of minorities would create great security threats to region South-Asia and also may proliferate towards western nations because there is a huge Indian diaspora living abroad that may infect the western democratic system by protecting Hindutva abroad. This study has revealed many incidences of transnational security concerns which could enhance through the alleged sponsorship of Modi's administration and its connections, with covert-world, abroad. International law for the protection of transnational repression shall be activated against Modi Sarkar and international criminal court should start proceedings against, alleged sponsorship of transnational repression and human rights violation in India.





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